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Aviation brigade flies final hours, sees change in Iraq

February 17, 2011

By **Spc. Roland Hale**

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Story Highlights

- Aviation brigade finishes Iraq tour
- Unit makes aviation history
- Unit sees success from the air above Iraq



CAMP TAJI, Iraq, Feb. 17, 2011 -- The Army's last active-duty aviation brigade in Iraq is heading home after a year-long deployment in support of operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn.

The Enhanced Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, deployed from Fort Riley, Kan., in March, and quickly became an integral player in U.S. Forces - Iraq's mission here.

When it first arrived, the unit was one of four aviation brigades in Iraq. Over the course of the deployment, however, it rapidly assumed responsibility for all Army aviation operations in the country. It is now the Army's only aviation brigade here, bolstered to meet that charge with increased numbers of troops and aircraft.

With nearly 4,000 troops and more than 200 helicopters, the brigade is double the size of a normal aviation brigade. The increased numbers make it the Army's first and only enhanced aviation brigade.

The brigade has made good use of every aircraft. It leaves Iraq having flown nearly 125,000 hours in support of USF-I's mission here.

"The statistics are an indication of what we've done to support the mission," said Col. Frank Muth, brigade commander. "What's behind the numbers are the hundreds more hours that Soldiers are turning wrenches to make the aircraft fly, supporting the mission."

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The brigade's primary mission is the support of U.S. ground forces, which involves freedom of maneuver, counter indirect fire, route clearance, and convoy security. It leaves with that mission accomplished, said Muth.

"We're ensuring we leave behind a safe and secure environment that allows the Iraqi government to flourish," said Muth.

The brigade's Apache aircraft provided security above Iraqi cities while the country held its second set of parliamentary elections last March. After nine months of political deadlock following those inconclusive elections, the brigade watched the Iraqi parliament approve a new government.

Also, the brigade played its part in providing troops with air transportation between bases as much as possible. With improvised explosive devices as one of the leading killers of servicemembers here, keeping U.S. forces off of the roads was one of the brigade's top missions.

The brigade has transported nearly 300,000 personnel and 10 million pounds of cargo this deployment.

In addition to fulfilling the unit's mission, the brigade has seen drastic improvements in Iraq overall, said Muth.

"The Iraqi nation has turned a corner," said Muth. "What I see is more lights on, more commerce taking place, more traffic on the road, people moving around to do business," he said.

The brigade has also invested its time in training with their Iraqi aviation counterparts.

On Camp Taji, one of the brigade's battalions has flown several partnership missions with an Iraqi squadron, as well as helped train Iraqi air traffic controllers. The brigade has also assisted ground forces in training Iraqis in air to ground integration operations.

The brigade is scheduled to end its mission here next month, when it will pass its mission to the California National Guard's 40th Combat Aviation Brigade.

The unit's overall impact here will depend on how well it prepares the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade to continue that mission, said Muth.

"The mark of a good unit leaving is when you hand off that mission to the new unit, the unit doesn't skip a beat, the mission isn't affected, and it's a smooth transition," said Muth.

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Soldiers in Iraq watch Super Bowl

February 9, 2011

By **Spc. Roland Hale**

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CAMP TAJI, Iraq - The spirit of Super Bowl Sunday reached Iraq this year, where a brigade of Soldiers out of Fort Riley, Kan., gathered to watch the Green Bay Packers take on the Pittsburgh Steelers.

On Camp Taji, Soldiers assigned to the Enhanced Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division tuned into the game via the American Forces Network, which broadcast the game live at 3 a.m. local time.

For them, a little tradition went a long way. Soldiers gathered in small groups around the camp, all doing their best to mask the austerity of their surroundings with a little taste of football culture and a semblance of home.

"It was great, camaraderie was good," said Capt. Adam Kirschling, commander of the brigade's headquarters company. "Any time we can break away from our normal day-to-day activities and have a good time, we love it."

A native of Mequon, Wis., Kirschling was one of the more die-hard Packers fans in the room as his Soldiers gathered to watch the game, he said. Nearly as much as he enjoyed watching his team win the Super Bowl, Kirschling said he was happy knowing the game put a good cap on the unit's deployment. With weeks until the brigade is scheduled to return to Fort Riley, the Super Bowl was one of the last big events its Soldiers will spend away from home.

"It's a milestone - it would've been nice to be home for it - but to know that this is wrapping up, it was a good way to unwind before we finish strong for the rest of the deployment," said Kirschling.

Steelers fan Spc. Adrian Billadeau did not catch the game live. An aircraft structural repairer assigned to the brigade's D Company, 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Aviation Regiment, he was getting rest before a long shift the next day.

"I caught bits and pieces when I got in," said Billadeau. "Enough to know my team lost, but at least I got to see some of it."

"Being here makes you value the things you have, the things you don't have and may have taken for granted," said Billadeau.

Billadeau said he plans to make up for the things he did not have this year in next year's Super Bowl. It will not be hard to do, he said, so long as he watches it from "somewhere

other than a plywood office."

Hundreds more Soldiers like Billadeau did not watch the live broadcast. While its deployment is drawing to a close, the brigade's operations are still in full-swing around the clock. For the Soldiers who were flying, maintaining, working, or on mandatory crew rest during the game, AFN is re-running the game several times.

The brigade will miss one more holiday, Valentine's Day, but is scheduled to return to Fort Riley beginning this month.

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Review of Purple Heart award policy allows Fort Riley officer to receive Purple Heart for TBI

April 29, 2011

By **Sgt. Roland Hale, CAB, 1st Inf. Div. PAO**

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FORT RILEY, Kan., April 29, 2011 -- Two years after receiving a traumatic brain injury in Iraq, and just days before heading into harm's way again, a change in policy allowed Lt. Col. Erich Campbell to receive the Purple Heart on Fort Riley, April 27, 2011.

Campbell, who is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan Friday, received the medal for injuries sustained when a suicide bomber disguised as an Iraqi police officer attacked his unit in 2008. The explosion killed six Iraqi police officers, including an Iraqi general, he said.

Campbell is one of the first servicemembers to receive a Purple Heart for traumatic brain injury, or TBI, due to a recent change in the military's recognition of the injuries.

"At the time of the injury, I was taken to the CSH (combat support hospital), given Motrin and told, 'Well you just got your bell rung, take three days off, get some rest and you should be good.' It wasn't very long after that that I realized there was something wrong."

Previously if service members were not diagnosed with TBI immediately after an incident, it could complicate the process of presenting them the Purple Heart, he explained.

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"What the Purple Heart does for me today is it quantifies that there really was something wrong with us," said Campbell.

Fort Riley and 1st Infantry Division Commander Maj. Gen. Vincent Brooks presented the medal to Campbell in front of an audience gathered at Fort Riley's TBI Clinic for the ceremony.

"This is a recognition that no one wants, no one seeks," said Brooks. "Unlike other decorations, it's not an award you earn. It's an entitlement. It's a way our nation says, 'You have exposed yourself and have borne the brunt of the battle.'"

Brooks also addressed the change that allowed Campbell to receive the Purple Heart.

"While blasts and traumatic brain injuries are not something new to warriors, not new at all, our recognition of it as an injury is very different. It's about time, quite frankly. It's about time," he said.

Campbell gave a speech to his audience after the ceremony, most of which he dedicated to thanking his friends in the community and the Army.

"I really know what we're fighting for. It's for you guys," said Campbell, pointing around the room, "and for our home."

"Someone once wrote a book, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child*. I'm here to tell you it takes a nation to heal a warrior. Not just the military," he said.

Campbell has spent the last year serving as the rear detachment commander for Fort Riley's Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. With that unit recently returned from Iraq, Campbell is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan with the 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division.

"(It) proves that you can suffer from a traumatic brain injury, get treated, not affect your career, and go on to serve the military," said Campbell.

Campbell said after his tour he plans to retire to his home in Holton, Kan., with his neighbors, his family and his Bassett hounds.

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BREAKING NEWS: SUICIDE BOMB ATTACK KILLS 26 PEOPLE IN SYRIAN CAPITAL

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FORT RILEY, Kan. - Army physical training is just the start of one Fort Riley Soldier's workout routine, as he and a team of four other Soldiers prepare to compete in what is best described simply as an obstacle course on steroids.

Sgt. Richard Mansford, a Soldier with the 601st Aviation Support Battalion, Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, is preparing for a Tough Mudder event June 25 at Beaver Creek, Co.

The competition is a nine-mile endurance course featuring 25 military-style obstacles with names like "Sweaty Yeti," "Electroshock Therapy," and "Everest."

And it's what Mansford does best, he said.

"Getting dirty, crawling through the mud, it's a blast, my favorite thing to do in the Army," said Mansford, who scored 315 out of 300 on his last PT test.

Mansford heard about the competition from a friend while he was deployed to Iraq last year. Since then, he and his team have been "hitting the gym and flipping tires" to get ready for the course, he said.

Mansford also prepared by competing in two similar challenges within his unit while he was deployed, he said.

The event is a chance for his team to give back to the military community, he said.

Tough Mudder has raised more than \$1 million for the Wounded Warriors Project by offering ticket discounts to competitors who raise \$150 for the charity.

"It's something that hits close to the heart, something that I think is awesome," said Mansford.

Competitors finishing in the top five percent of each Tough Mudder event are eligible to compete in the World's Toughest Mudder competition.

"We'll see about that," said Mansford. "We are just excited to go have fun and knock it out."

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Sgt. Richard Mansford carries a hose during a unit competition in Iraq last year, which he entered as preparation for a Tough Mudder event June 25 in Beaver Creek, Co. Mansford and four other Soldiers from the 601st Aviation Support Battalion, CAB, 1ID, are entering the nine-mile, 25-obstacle competition as a team. Photo:Photo: Sgt. Roland Hale, CAB, 1st Inf. Div. PAO



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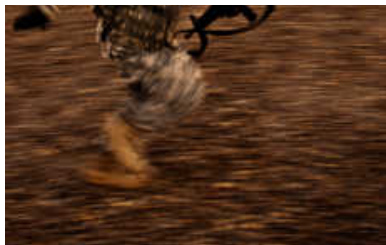
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Sgt. Richard Mansford sprints across a marksmanship range during a unit competition in Iraq last year, which he entered as preparation for a Tough Mudder event June 25 in Beaver Creek, Co. Mansford and four other Soldiers from the 601st Aviation Support Battalion, CAB, 1ID, are entering the nine-mile, 25-obstacle competition as a team.

Photo: Sgt. Roland Hale, CAB, 1st Inf. Div. PAO)



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Fort Riley honors its fallen in 9/11 Ceremony of Remembrance

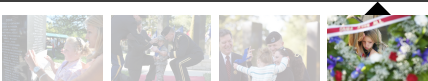
September 11, 2011

By **Sgt. Roland Hale, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs**

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The Fort Riley community gathered at the post's Global War on Terror monument today to honor their fallen comrades in a 9/11 remembrance ceremony.

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Soldiers, Families, first responders and politicians, including Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, attended the ceremony to pay their respect to those lost in the attacks ten years ago and the Fort Riley troops who have died since.

The ceremony was centered on the monument, a small replica of the twin towers which bears the names of Fort Riley Soldiers who have given their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. Fifteen names were added to the monument this year, all members of the 1st Infantry Division.

Commanding general of Fort Riley and the 1st Inf. Div., Maj. Gen. William Mayville, spoke during the ceremony.

"Today the 1st Infantry Division has over 11,000 troops deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait," said Mayville. "When they return, others from this division will replace them.
"None are more mindful of the price of our freedom than those in uniform who serve in harm's way to defend it; none are more mindful of the cost of freedom than the and children who have lost loved ones fighting for it," he said.

Samantha Cook and her two children were among those on the receiving end of the general's speech.

Just three months ago, Samantha's husband, Spc. Michael Cook, Jr., died serving in Iraq with the division's 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team. It was June 6, his birthday.

"I'm honored to be here," said Cook after helping her daughter place Michael's name on the monument. "It's hard to see his name on there, but it's an honor.

"It was something very special that I'm going to cherish, that my kids are going to cherish," she said.

Mayville and Brownback also presented the children of the fallen Soldiers with memorial medallions, bearing the names of their parents.

In closing his speech, the general gave encouraging words the crowd, offering evidence of success in the Army's missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their loved ones had not fought and died in vain, he said.

"Where we have committed our resources, our treasures and our blood, we have made real progress," said Mayville. "We are making a difference on behalf of those we honor today."

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